3.0 PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS

This chapter describes the planning process used to develop the project alternatives and the environmental documentation. It also describes the process for evaluation of alternatives.

3.1 Project Background

The study portion of I-94 has been identified by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) as one of the freeways in greatest need of improvement. In 1994 MDOT initiated the I-94 Rehabilitation Project to evaluate improvement options that addressed the concerns discussed in Chapter 2 of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

A study team made up of representatives of MDOT and its consultants led the study of the proposed project. The team gathered data, developed various alternatives, and evaluated these alternatives. The team presented alternatives and proposals to the Interagency Coordination Committee (ICC) and refined the alternatives in response to ICC comments.

The ICC is composed of representatives from MDOT, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), Wayne County, Macomb County, the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), the City of Detroit, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). It serves as the steering committee responsible for providing oversight of the study. The committee reviewed early coordination and scoping activities and public involvement programs used to inform the public about the proposed project. The ICC also evaluated the alternatives based on the study's goals and objectives. The evaluations are documented in meeting minutes.

The ICC is continuing review of the study and input. The input ensures that business and community interests and concerns are addressed. The ICC will continue to provide guidance to the study team throughout the alternative selection process.

The original scope of the I-94 Rehabilitation Project included only improvements to the I-94 mainline. Modifications to the M-10 and I-75 interchanges were not originally considered as part of the project. However, as possible options for improvement were assessed, the M-10 and I-75 interchanges were included as part of this project. Improving the I-94 mainline without improving the interchanges would not satisfactorily address the purpose and need identified for the project. Therefore, in 1997 the scope of the project was modified to include improvements to the M-10 and I-75 interchanges.

3.2 Public Participation Program

Public participation has been an essential ingredient in the evaluation of alternatives and development of the DEIS and will be an important element in the implementation of the

recommended transportation improvements. The public participation program for this study was designed to solicit ideas and input about the project from local stakeholders which include citizens, community groups, and other key audiences. It provides the basis for interaction among stakeholders and ensures that decisions made during the study process include consideration of the challenges and opportunities that exist within the project area. Goals of the public participation program include imparting a high level of knowledge, understanding, and confidence among stakeholders and successfully addressing public issues and concerns during project planning. The program is intended to create an environment for stakeholders to express issues and concerns to the study team and to feel confident that these issues and concerns will be addressed. Therefore, the program is structured to provide information in a clear and concise manner to all citizens and enable them to fully participate in the planning process.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was an important element in the public participation process. The CAC included business and community stakeholders and helped the study team and the ICC understand business and community concerns and opportunities associated with this project.

Public involvement meetings (PIMs) were another element of the public participation program. The PIMs were open-forum meetings held at locations throughout the project area. At these meetings, the study team presented project information and received comments.

In addition to PIMs, several methods to inform the public were included in the public participation program:

- Press conference to initiate the project
- Press releases
- Television and radio public announcements
- Newsletters
- Project hotline
- Radio interviews
- Television interviews
- Project brochures
- Project informational video

Meetings with individuals and small cluster groups were also conducted. Chapter 8 documents the public involvement program.

3.3 Process for Selecting Alternatives for Further Evaluation

The process used to evaluate the alternatives is illustrated in Figure 3-1. The process began by identifying a wide range of alternatives. These alternatives were generated from multiple sources such as public meetings, special interest groups, and the study team. The alternatives were presented by the study team to the ICC for review. The ICC modified alternatives as necessary to ensure that the alternatives were consistent with study goals and objectives.

Preliminary evaluation using the goals and objectives established for the study and additional public input reduced the number of suggested alternatives. The ICC eliminated alternatives from further study that were not consistent with project goals and objectives. The outcome of this stage of the evaluation was the selection of Practical Alternatives.

This DEIS documents the study and evaluation process up to and including the Practical Alternatives stage. The alternatives, which originally included one No-Build alternative and two Build alternatives, were presented to the ICC and the public for further review and comment. Various issues raised by the public and during small group meetings were used to refine the alternatives. The refinements included modifying alignments, combining design elements of alternatives, and proposing new alternatives. Further evaluation of the resulting refined Practical Alternatives--the No-Build Alternative, Enhanced No-Build Alternative, and Build Alternative--will lead to the selection of a Recommended Alternative. The Recommended Alternative will be the outcome of this study after circulation of the DEIS and the subsequent public hearing.

Following circulation of this DEIS and the subsequent public hearing, the study team will consider public and agency comments, environmental impacts, engineering feasibility, and benefits to the traveling public of the Practical Alternatives. Based on this evaluation, the study team will select a Recommended Alternative. The Recommended Alternative and the selection process will be documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Selection of the Recommended Alternative will be documented in a Record of Decision (ROD). The decision-making process, reasons for selection of the Recommended Alternative, and mitigation measures will be incorporated in the ROD.

The design of the proposed alternatives to this point in the study has been preliminary and conceptual. After selection of a Recommended Alternative and issuance of the ROD, the alternative will be subject to final engineering for design completion and right-of-way acquisition.

The proposed I-94 Rehabilitation Project is included in the SEMCOG 2025 Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as a study. Upon completion of the study, the Recommended Alternative will be included in the SEMCOG Regional Transportation Plan and TIP as a proposed project. The Recommended Alternative will be included in the SEMCOG air quality analysis to determine conformity with the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for air quality. The proposed project conforms with the SIP if the project does not add excess pollutants to the state's air quality budget. FHWA may issue clearance for the project after the proposed project is included in the TIP and found to be in conformance with the SIP.

The cost of the project and the traffic disruption caused by construction will require that the project be constructed in different phases over a period of years. Construction requirements and funding availability will be assessed after a Recommended Alternative is selected. Project phases will be scheduled to utilize available funding and enable

acquisition of future funding. Scheduling will also accommodate right-of-way acquisition, if required, and construction phasing to minimize traffic disruption.

3.4 Other Projects

This project is part of a series of proposed projects to improve the transportation system in Detroit and southeast Michigan. This proposed project is the first of other I-94 improvement projects in southeast Michigan. In addition, within Detroit, projects on other interstate freeways and highways are scheduled, including the reconstruction of the I-75/I-96 mainline from south of West Grand Boulevard to the existing I-96 interchange.

The Dequindre Yard Bridge, on I-94 between I-75 and Chene Street, is currently being reconstructed within the I-94 Rehabilitation Project limits. It is being reconstructed on the current alignment and with the current configuration. This 1.5-mile portion of I-94 is more than 30 years old and in need of immediate repair. The repair could not be postponed until the design of the I-94 Rehabilitation Project is complete.

The Dequindre Yard Bridge reconstruction includes 27 spans of the bridge over the Dequindre Yard and the Grand Trunk Western Conrail Railroad east of I-75. In addition, the Woodward Avenue Bridge over I-94 has been reconstructed.

Although the I-94 bridges and roadway over the Dequindre Yard are currently being rebuilt and slightly widened for the ongoing project, they are not being reconstructed to include the proposed improvements under consideration in this DEIS for I-94. No additional driving lanes, continuous service drives, or space in the median will be constructed as part of the project. If the Build Alternative is selected as the Recommended Alternative, as much as possible of the rebuilt portion of I-94, bridges, and the I-75 interchange will be retained and incorporated into the I-94 Rehabilitation Project.